

History Is Preserved in Interesting Ways

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For: FairburyNews.Net
Date: April 15, 2024

On October 27, 1830, Valentine Martin Darnall and his wife Rachel Darnall arrived six miles south of Fairbury and became the first white settlers in Livingston County.

One hundred years later, in 1930, the Rev. J. H. Ryan was the President of the Livingston County Historical Society. Henry J. Mies (1869-1932) was one of its founding members in 1924.

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Darnall family arriving at their new home south of Fairbury, Rev. Ryan and Henry Mies decided to hold a celebration event. This event would be on the farm of William D. Spence, great-grandson of Valentine and Rachel Darnall. A memorial stone and plaque were created and placed on this farm.

The event was significant, with 144 direct descendants of Mr. and Mrs. Darnall plus several hundred other descendants and friends. The Fairbury Blade newspaper published a long story about this event on August 29, 1930.

Henry Mies of Saunemin was an avid collector of Native American artifacts. He was also an amateur photographer. Henry learned how to take photographs using glass negatives. By 1930, glass negatives were obsolete technology. To be more historically accurate, Henry decided to take glass plate negative photos of the Darnall descendants at the event. Copies of this panoramic photograph still exist. Marilyn Wells of Fairbury is the only descendant in the old picture still living. She was a six-year-old girl sitting in the front row with her brother, Howard Payne. Marilyn Wells had her 100th birthday in February 2024. Fairbury photographer Dudley Fultz also took a panoramic photograph of the Darnall descendants that day.

The Darnall celebration was not the only photographic event planned on that Saturday. After taking photos at the Spence farm south of Fairbury, Henry Mies took his photographic equipment about 10 miles east to Oliver's Grove south of Chatsworth.

In 1850, Simon and Barbara Young emigrated from Ohio to Livingston County, Illinois. When they reached the area now known as Chatsworth, they camped for the night at Franklin Oliver's home. Their son, Thomas N. Young, was eight years old when they visited Franklin Oliver. Franklin Oliver showed them several area sites, including his first house, an Indian burial ground, the location of the corn crib built by the Kickapoo tribe, and the old Kickapoo and Potawatomi Trail. This tour by Franklin Oliver made a life-long impression on eight-year-old T. N. Young.

Eighty years later, in 1930, Thomas N. Young was 87 years old. Mr. Young wanted Henry Mies to photographically document the sites Franklin Oliver showed him 80 years earlier. Mr. Mies took four photographs of Mr. Young illustrating the sites' locations.

Henry Mies was tragically killed in October 1932 near Jacksonville, Illinois. He drove his car onto a railroad crossing and was killed by the collision with the train. His wife was seriously injured but survived the accident. Henry Mies was only 63 years old when he died. Thomas N. Young died in 1935 at the age of 92.

The photographic glass plates that Mies had of the 1930 photographs were passed along to his son and then to Carl T. Hunsicker (1904-1989). Mr. Hunsicker was a Pontiac resident and also was interested in photography. Mr. Hunsicker owned and operated Hunsicker Sign and Outdoor Advertising in Pontiac from 1926 to 1949. He served 14 years as an alderman in Pontiac's 5th Ward and served on the Livingston County Board of Supervisors from 1951 to 1961. Mr. Hunsicker then served 12 years as the Illinois State Representative for the 38th District. Carl Hunsicker was a member of the Chief City Camera Club.

Mr. Hunsicker died in 1989 at the age of 84. After his death, one of his descendants was assigned to clean out the photographic dark room that Mr. Hunsicker used for his photography hobby. The descendant boxed up the old plate glass negatives and took the boxes to his home. The descendant contacted Roger Kutzner of the Livingston County Historical Society to see if the Society wanted any materials from the dark room.

Roger went to the descendant's home and saved the four glass plate negatives that documented the Thomas N. Young photographic session at Oliver's Grove in 1930.

Roger used a couple of different photography shops to get paper prints made from the glass plate negatives. Roger donated copies of these four photo prints to the Dixon Mounds Museum, the Chatsworth Historical Society, and the Livingston County Historical Society.

In January 2023, current Livingston County Historical Society President Dale C. Maley cleaned and organized all of the artifacts in the Historical Society's archives. Mr. Maley discovered the four paper prints from 1930 at Oliver's Grove. These four prints were scanned and uploaded to Archive.Org, a website that allows anyone to view or download copies of these documents.

Franklin Oliver's first cabin burned in 1877. Mr. Oliver built a second cabin in which he lived until he died in 1881. The location of the second cabin is known to Chatsworth area descendants of Franklin Oliver, but the location of the first cabin was still being determined.

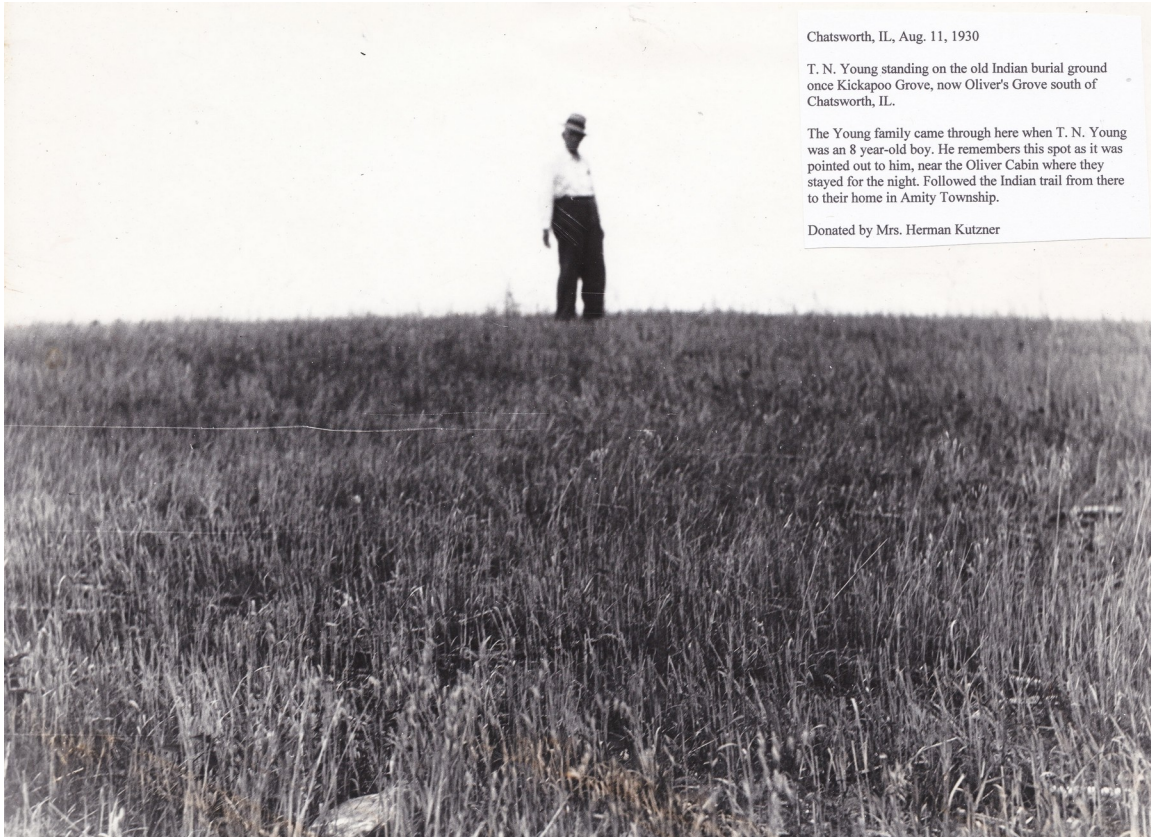
Computer copies of the four prints were shared with some of the Historical Society members from Chatsworth. They used the 1930 photographs to find the location of Franklin Oliver's first cabin.

It took a unique combination of events to preserve the four 1930 photographs of the Oliver Grove area south of Chatsworth. Henry Mies and Thomas N. Young had the foresight to capture the critical locations before either of them died. Carl Hunsicker preserved the glass negatives. Roger Kutzner used the negatives to make print copies, which were donated to the Livingston County Historical Society. The digital copies of these 1930 printed photographs will be preserved for many more decades to come on the Archive.Org website. Future researchers can easily find and examine copies of these historic old photographs.



Panoramic photograph of descendants of pioneer settlers Valentine and Rachael Darnall who settled south of Fairbury in 1830. Photo taken by Dudley Fultz on August 23, 1930. Marilyn Payne - Wells is the young girl in the front row, the 14th person from the left hand side. Marilyn recently celebrated her 100th birthday and is the only person in the photograph known to still be living.

Franklin Oliver Photos



Chatsworth, IL, Aug. 11, 1930

T. N. Young standing on the old Indian burial ground once Kickapoo Grove, now Oliver's Grove south of Chatsworth, IL.

The Young family came through here when T. N. Young was an 8 year-old boy. He remembers this spot as it was pointed out to him, near the Oliver Cabin where they stayed for the night. Followed the Indian trail from there to their home in Amity Township.

Donated by Mrs. Herman Kutzner

Chatsworth, IL, Aug. 11, 1930

Looking north from the old Indian burial ground to where the Indians camped (Kickapoo Tribe) lake in early day in the valley land.

Donated by Mrs. Herman Kutzner



CHATSORTH ILL. AUG. 11, 1930.

T. N. YOUNG STANDING ON THE SPOT WHERE THE FRANKLIN OLIVER CABIN ONCE STOOD, BUILT IN 1831. THE YOUNG FAMILY CAMPED HERE FOR THE NIGHT. CAME OVER THE OLD KICKAPOO AND POTTAWATOMIE TRAIL WHEN T. N. YOUNG WAS A BOY 8 YRS. OLD. HE REMEMBERS THE CABIN AND TRAIL OF 80 YRS. AGO. HE REMEMBERS THE CABIN AND TRAIL OF 80 YRS. AGO. HE REMEMBERS THE CABIN AND TRAIL OF 80 YRS. AGO. HE REMEMBERS THE CABIN AND TRAIL OF 80 YRS. AGO.

LOOKING ACROSS WHAT ONCE WAS A LAKE TO THE BLUFF IN THE DISTANCE, WHERE THE INDIAN ENCAMPMENT WAS LOCATED, UP TO 1832.

SOUTH OF CHATSORTH ILL NOW OLIVERS GROVE. FRAGMENTS OF OLD BLUE CHINAWARE AND BUTTONS PICKED UP THAT DAY.

AN ANVIL STONE ONCE USED BY THE INDIANS RUSTED IRON AND OTHER THINGS.





Officer... CHATSWORTH ILL. AUG. 11, 1930
TAKEN FROM WHERE THE CAVE WAS ONCE LOCATED
By... IN KICKAPOO GROVE. LOOKING EAST WHERE THE INDIAN
CORN CRIB ONCE STOOD.
THE OLD CRIB HOLDS MANY A STORY OF EARLY DAYS.
SOUTH OF CHATSWORTH ILL. NOW OLIVERS GROVE, ONCE KICKAPOO GROVE.